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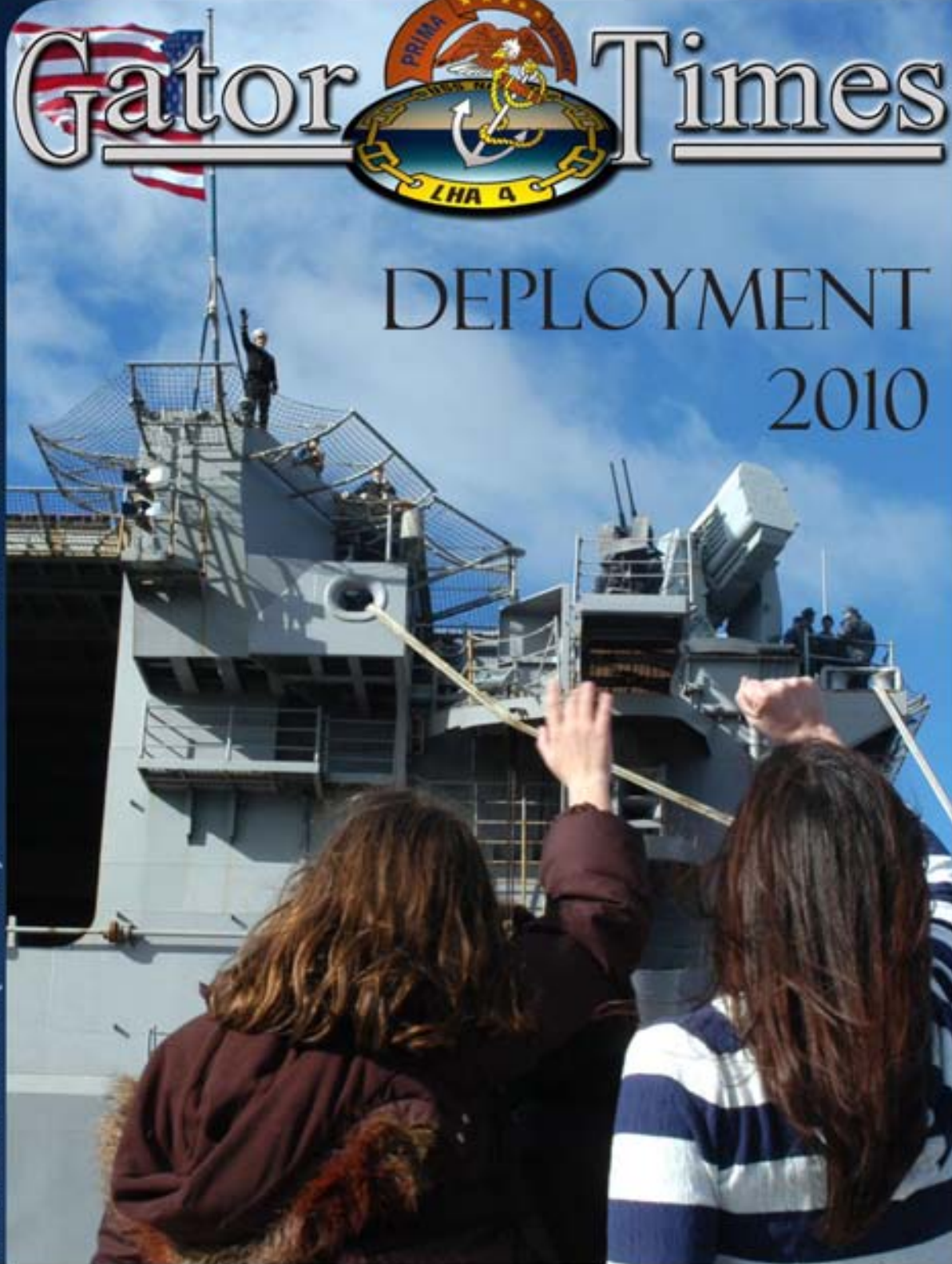
# Gator Times



## DEPLOYMENT 2010

THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"

USS NASSAU (LHA 4)





# Gator Times

30 years  
LHA 4

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On The Cover:  
Family members of Lt. Scott Moak, hangar bay officer, wave goodbye before the amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4) deploys Jan 18.  
Photo by MC3 Brian Goodwin

Greetings shipmates and thank you for reading the January edition of the Gator Times Captain's Call.

The first two weeks of our deployment have turned out very different from what we had planned. Instead of heading to the Mediterranean Sea, we came to the Caribbean Sea to lend humanitarian aid and disaster relief in the earthquake-ravaged country of Haiti.

Since arriving we've delivered food and supplies, provided security patrols, and received medical evacuees.

One of those patients brought into our medical ward was a two-day-old baby girl who was found in a cardboard box. Today we brought her mother aboard for a heartfelt reunion with her daughter.

We've sent electricians, carpenters and engineers to the beach to help with rebuilding the country's infrastructure, and now our Marines are hitting the beach hard to help out in any capacity required.

We've got an uncertain future ahead of us off the coast of Haiti. But I am confident that the Nassau/24 MEU team is prepped and ready to face whatever mission our

## Captain's Call

Capt. Ronald Reis  
Commanding Officer  
USS Nassau (LHA 4)



country assigns to us.

Keep focused, Shipmates.

Until next time... stay motivated and remember to motivate those around you!

## CMC Corner



Shipmates, Nassau Family and Friends,

I'd like to start 2010 by personally thanking everyone for a successful holiday season and for all the hard our Sailors accomplished prior to our getting underway on the 18th. I hope everyone had the opportunity to relax and spend time together. I know our last month in Norfolk went by fast and was bittersweet for our Sailors and families.

We were fortunate to have pleasant weather for our departure. It was great seeing so many families take advantage of the chance to come aboard and spend a few precious moments together before the ship got underway.

We're starting our deployment with a detour to Haiti to assist with disaster relief. We have a number of Sailors onboard were here to assist the citizens of Galveston, Texas, in 2008. They and the rest of the crew are ready and eager to assist the people of Haiti in anyway they can. We have no idea how long we will remain in the area, but we will remain flexible and keep our families informed of our progress via the Ombudsmen and the Nassau Family

Readiness Group (NFRG) e-mail list.

I'd like to remind everyone of our dedicated support team back in Norfolk, there to assist with any issues that arise while we're deployed. If family members are not on the Ombudsmen's or NFRG e-mail lists, I highly encourage you to do so. Sailors can do so by contacting the Ombudsmen at [nassauombudsman@yahoo.com](mailto:nassauombudsman@yahoo.com) or the NFRG at [nfrgpresident@yahoo.com](mailto:nfrgpresident@yahoo.com) with their family member name and e-mail address. I'd also encourage our family members to attend at least one NFRG meeting to see what the group is about and they great things they do.

In closing, I'd like to thank you, our families and friends, for the sacrifices you've made during our work-up cycle and now during this deployment. Your support is the key to the success for Nassau and the personal accomplishment of our Sailors. To our Sailors, your sacrifices haven't gone unnoticed and I thank you for your dedication and professionalism to Nassau and the Navy as a whole. Until next issue, take care and God bless.



# NAS ARG Departs for Deployment

By MC2 Coleman Thompson  
Navy Public Affairs Element - East

The amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4) departed her homeport Jan. 18 as the flagship of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (NAS ARG) for a regularly scheduled seven-month deployment in support of maritime security operations.

"We look forward to being challenged during this deployment," said Capt. John G. Bruening, commanding officer, Amphibious Squadron EIGHT.

"We've trained the way we fight, we went through a very strenuous and tasking training cycle, and now I think our group is really looking forward to utilizing our training in our upcoming missions."

The list of exercises and certifications the crew completed during their training cycle includes the Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) and Certification Exercise (CERTEX).

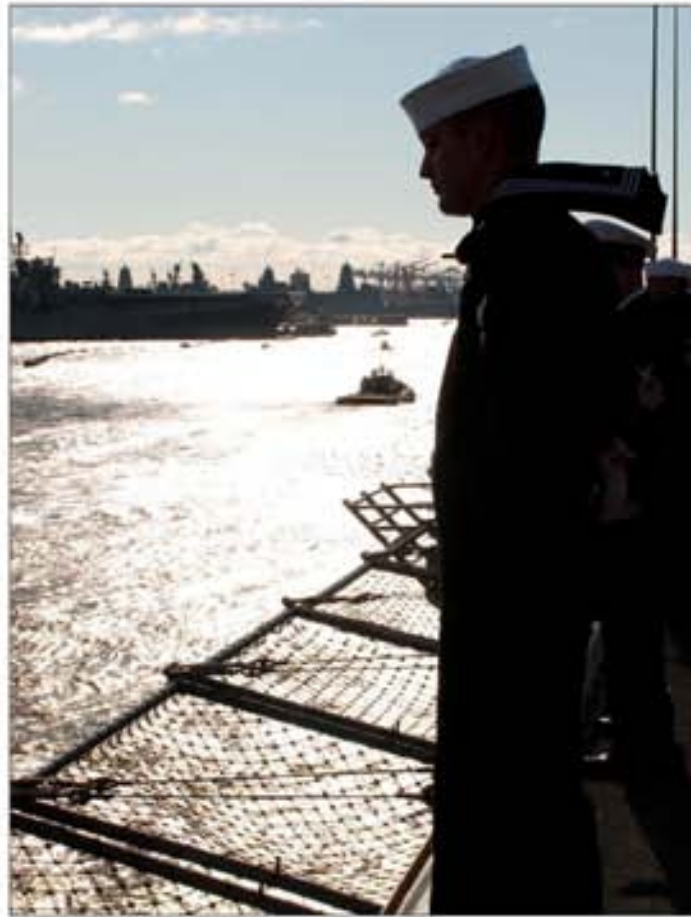
"We're very proud of what we've accomplished in the six months that this group; the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) and the Sailors and Marines of USS Ashland, USS Mesa Verde and of course Nassau; has been working together," said Bruening.

With the recent disaster in Haiti however, it is currently unclear if the NAS ARG will continue across the Atlantic Ocean to the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet Areas of Responsibility, or turn south to assist the beleaguered island.

While addressing the crew of Nassau, Rear Adm. Michelle Howard, commander Expeditionary Strike Group Two, commented that no matter what destination lies in wait, the NAS ARG is ready for what's to come.

"You will be given the opportunity to showcase the strength and unity of the Navy and Marine Corps team," said Howard. "Whether that opportunity comes while providing humanitarian assistance or forward deployed." Family members and friends were on the pier to bid teary-eyed farewells and express their pride to their Sailors and Marines.

"It's always challenging whenever you leave your friends and family," said Bruening. "We worry about them and they worry about us, but I think that the families understand that we wouldn't be doing this unless we were



Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class Lance Whitacre mans the rails of USS Nassau (LHA 4) as the ship pulls out of homeport. USS Nassau deployed as part of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group/24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (NAS ARG/24MEU) in support of Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) efforts in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

trained to do it, which we are."

USS Nassau (LHA 4) is deployed as part of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group/24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (NAS ARG/24MEU) in support of Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) efforts in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet Areas of Responsibility. The NAS ARG/24 MEU is comprised of embarked Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the multi-purpose amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48), and the amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19).

# Something to Remember



Aviation Boatswain's Mate (handling) Airman Collin Smith plays the guitar after working hours aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4). Smith strums his guitar often during downtime, playing songs that remind him of home and enjoying the memories he made with his family and friends. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau  
USS Nassau Public Affairs

When Sailors are out to sea, what little personal space they have is often filled with reminders of what family and friends back on shore. It could be a scent, a taste, or a song that sparks a memory of loved ones waiting for them back home.

USS Nassau (LHA 4) is deployed as part of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group/24th Marine Expeditionary

Unit (NAS ARG/24MEU) in support of Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) efforts in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. Sailors and Marines aboard Nassau are preparing their sea bags and bringing personal objects that hold a special meaning to them; a little piece of home.

"I've never gone out to sea without bringing my guitar," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airman Collin Smith. "It's a necessity. The songs I play remind me of the people I left on shore and I'll play songs for my friends to reminisce about the good times back home."

Personnel Specialist 1st Class (SW/AW) Rhonda Payne used to bring photo albums full of pictures on long cruises.

"Now I have a digital picture frame, which holds four gigabytes of pictures and displays them much like a slide-show," said Payne. "It's a lot easier to pack and I don't have to clean out an extra drawer for my photo collection."

On their first anniversary, Payne's husband gave her a teddy bear, which she cherishes and brings with her on long trips out to sea.

"I like to spray it with his cologne so I can hold it and think about all of the memorable moments we have at home," Payne said.

A good book can pass the time as well. Ensign Marie Cadice reads her favorite books underway to bring her back to the first time she read them.

"A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens has always been a favorite and "Emma" by Jane Austin really makes me feel like a woman when I read it," said Cadice.

She added that she also brings her collection of T-shirts to wear when she goes to the gym. Each one represents a different place she's been or a marathon she's run.

"It's just nice to have personal niceties lying around to remind you of your loved ones," Payne said. "If I'm in a funk, I can just hug my teddy bear or look at my pictures to remind me why I'm here."

The NAS ARG/24 MEU is comprised of embarked Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the multi-purpose amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48), and the amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19).



# DEPLOYMENT 2010



A United States Navy Sailor aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) gazes out to the pier while manning the rails just before departure from Naval Station Norfolk.  
Photo by MC3 Desiree Green



Sailors aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) prepare to man the rails as they pull out of homeport.  
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson



Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class Daniel Kegel mans the rails of USS Nassau (LHA 4) as the ship prepares to pull out of homeport.  
Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau



Sailors aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) make their way onto the flight deck to man the rails before departure from Naval Station Norfolk.  
Photo by MC3 Desiree Green



Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airmen Scott Yurek and Eric Brimley change out the Union Jack for ship's colors aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) as the ship pulls out of homeport.  
Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau



Capt. John G. Bruening, commodore, Amphibious Squadron Eight, looks out at the piers of Naval Station Norfolk while aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) as she departs for her regularly scheduled deployment.  
Photo by MC2 Coleman Thompson



# Around the Ship



LL Cmdr. Chris Bailey places an officer's cover on CWO2 (SW/AW) Derand Lee's head at his commissioning ceremony on the mess decks Jan. 15.  
Photo by MC2 Patrick Gordon



Capt. Ronald Reis, commanding officer of USS Nassau (LHA 4), congratulates Sailors during a trucking ceremony in the hangar bay at sea Dec. 15, 2009.  
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson



Master-at-Arms 2nd Class (SW/AW) Michael Sanders receives an award from Dave Vachet, vice president of the Richmond, Va. Navy League, for earning USS Nassau's (LHA 4) Junior Sailor of the Year Award Jan. 12.  
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

## Caffeine: Not Just a Harmless Drug

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau  
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Readiness aboard a naval vessel requires 24 hour vigilance. Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/AW/FMF) Scott Radke said many Sailors self-medicate with caffeine in order to stay awake while they work.

"Caffeine is one of the most dangerous drugs that we can legally use," said Radke. "I've seen caffeine cause seizures, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and other borderline emotionally and mentally unstable states."

Ship's Serviceman 2nd Class (SW/AW) Daphne Yowk, USS Nassau's (LHA 4) Supply Department S-3 Division records keeper, said the ship's store sold 228 cases of energy drinks and 952 cases of soda in November.

"With 24 cans per case, that's 5,376 energy drinks and 22,848 sodas consumed in a month," Yowk said. She added that these numbers include the Red Bull energy drink machine.

"I drink about five to eight energy drinks and sodas a day," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handler) 2nd Class (AW/SW) Matt Arnold.

According to Lt. Jennifer Isner, a general medical officer aboard Nassau, large amounts of caffeine can cause long term effects such as kidney stones and heart problems. She added that these are an addition to the long list of side effects from the other chemicals in energy drinks.

"Energy drinks are seriously detrimental for your body," said Airman Stephanie Lathi, who plans on cross rating to Hospital Corpsman. "The chemicals they add and the large amount of stimulants make energy drinks by far the worst caffeine drink for your system. A little known fact for the gym regulars is that mixing many types of workout supplements with energy drinks can cause cardiac arrest."

The amount of chemicals and supplements in energy drinks can vary greatly between cans of the same brand because they are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.



Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Mackenzie Besso goes on a soda run for his division while on duty aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4). Besso said that his division drinks a lot of sodas and they end up making about 10 soda runs a work day. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

"Anywhere from 1 to 100 milligrams of any given supplement in an energy drink can be present in two cans of the same brand," Radke said.

"Caffeine and sugar seriously dehydrate the body, making it that much harder to flush out the other bad chemicals, which in turn causes a crash after the rush," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (FMF) Jonathan Knotts. "If you notice yourself falling asleep during the day and feeling less refreshed after you wake up or having a hard time waking up in the morning, try to make your last caffeine drink five to six hours before hitting your rack."

One or two cups of coffee in the morning without creamer or sugar is a tip Knotts offered to moderate caffeine intake. He said black coffee is a better alternative to sodas and energy drinks because of the lack of sugar and chemicals.

"Vitamin B-12 is the best healthy alternative to caffeine," said Isner. "B-12 produces a longer energy rush without the crash that caffeine causes. I recommend this vitamin



# USS Nassau Keeps Golden Anchors

By MC2 Patrick Gordon  
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau (LHA 4) has earned the Retention Excellence Award for the second year in a row, this time earning the distinction for Fiscal Year 2009.

The award honors commands that have not only maintained a high level of reenlistments, and low attrition, but also met or exceeded professional development standards such as sponsorship, conducting career development boards and maintaining a high level of advancements. As a result, Nassau is allowed to paint its anchors gold.

"The award used to be all about numbers. Just statistics concerning who reenlisted and who separated," said Senior Chief Navy Counselor (SW/AW) Harold Gibbs III. "But now that's not the case. Now it's more performance based and about taking care of the crew. It's going away from just raw data and asking the question, 'Is the command actually taking care of its Sailors?'"

Earning the retention award for Nassau was a feat accomplished by everyone aboard, said Gibbs. While leadership is involved in a Sailor's reenlistment, ultimately the decision to reenlist is up to the individual Sailor, and the Nassau's Top Gator Career Development Team helps Sailors decide what they want to do.

"Getting the retention award shows teamwork," said Gibbs. "Overall, it's everybody aboard the ship. From the Chiefs Mess and Wardroom, down to our Third Class Petty Officers, all working together to ensure our Sailors are aware of their options. We use several tools at our disposal such as the Career Information Management System (CIMS) and FLEETRide to make sure Sailors are qualified to do what they want to do in and out of the Navy."

"We talk to Sailors and figure out what they want to get out of life. It's all about goals," said Gibbs. "If we can help them set and come up with attainable goals, then



Senior Chief Operations Specialist (SWIAW) Reginald Farr takes the oath of enlistment from Ensign Birtney Maehl Dec. 10, 2009. USS Nassau (LHA 4) recently earned the Retention Excellence Award for its high level of reenlistments and professional development. Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

they're more likely to meet those goals because they will know how to get there. We just help them by giving them the knowledge to figure out and attain those goals."

Gibbs explained that there are many incentives available to Sailors who choose to reenlist, such as Selective-Reenlistment Bonuses, Permanent Change of Station orders and advanced training at "A" and "C" Schools. Special programs are also available to qualified Sailors who reenlist, such as recruiting duty, recruit training duty and staff duty overseas.

Even senior leadership must decide whether or not to continue their naval career. Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Stanley Kopiczak, Command Master Chief of Nassau, reenlisted Jan. 18. Kopiczak said that retention aboard the Nassau is a crew effort from top to bottom, and that the retention award proves that.

"This award reflects greatly upon the Nassau," said Kopiczak. "It shows that we've got a great crew and we do good things for the Navy and our country as a whole. That leadership shows to our young Sailors there is definitely a benefit to staying in."

Nassau will retain its gold anchors for a year until they are under review for the award again next year.

# Post 9/11 GI Bill Offers New Opportunities to Service Members

USS Nassau Public Affairs

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to service members with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and service members honorably discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days.

The GI Bill offers tuition and fees for approved education and training, including graduate and undergraduate degrees and vocational/technical training offered by an institution of higher learning and approved for GI Bill benefits. Tutorial assistance, and licensing and certification test reimbursement are also allowed.

"As far as benefits to the individual service member go, the Post 9/11 GI bill puts more money in to a service member's pocket and offers higher tuition for school," said NCC(SW/AW) Bobbie Maxwell of USS Nassau's (LHA 4) Command Career Counselor's Office. Financial benefits are based on the highest public in-state tuition charged by an educational institution in the state where the educational institution is located. Those who attend more expensive private institutions may find financial assistance through the Yellow Ribbon Program.

The Yellow Ribbon Program allows private schools to voluntarily agree with the Veterans Administration (VA) to jointly cover tuition costs of schools that fall outside the maximum allotment. The school reduces tuition and fees and receives matching funds of the same amount from the VA, reducing the out-of-pocket expense to the beneficiary.

In addition to tuition, the Post-9/11 GI Bill offers a housing allowance equal to the basic housing allowance payable to a military E-5 with dependents, as well as an annual \$1,000 stipend to cover the costs of books and supplies.

Another benefit for service members is transferability. Any unused educational benefits may be transferred to either a spouse or dependent children. Family members must be enrolled in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System (DEERS) and the service member must be eligible to transfer educational benefits.

"The Montgomery GI Bill is only available to the service member," said Maxwell. "But the Post 9/11 GI Bill has the option of transferring to a family member. So if eligible, dependents can receive education benefits as well."

For more information contact the command Career Counselor's Office or go to <http://www.npc.navy.mil/CareerInfo/Education/GIBill> or [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

## POST - 9/11 GI BILL A NEW BILL FOR A NEW CENTURY



Graphic courtesy of Army.mil

## CAFFEINE, from page 3

to anyone looking to cut their caffeine intake or quit altogether."

Radke added that staying hydrated and cutting your caffeine intake in half is a good start to quitting.

"If you hydrate your body while quitting caffeine, the withdrawals are much less severe," Radke said. "This enables you to wean yourself off of caffeine until you can eventually quit."

"If smoking and caffeine were outlawed and everyone quit at the same time, heart disease related deaths would be drastically reduced," Lathi said. "Sleep is more refreshing, your healthy energy levels go up, and your cardiovascular system will appreciate the absence of this detrimental drug."